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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HONG KONG 001596

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SUBJECT: CODEL BERMAN MEETING WITH HONG KONG PAN-DEMOCRATS

REF: HONG KONG 1587

Classified By: Acting Consul General Christopher Marut for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: In an August 22 coffee hosted by the Acting Consul General, Hong Kong pan-democratic leaders warned CoDel Berman that Beijing would seek a form of "managed democracy" in Hong Kong which would leave them in control of candidates for Chief Executive. Beijing employs two strategies in the hope of ensuring political support: convincing people Hong Kong is economically dependent on China, and convincing them that patriotism means loving the Chinese Communist Party. The real problem, they believe, is the lack of leadership in Hong Kong willing to stand up both to Hong Kong's business establishment and Beijing in support of democratic development and "one country, two systems." International attention is welcome, and indeed the continued success of "one country, two systems" is in the interest of Hong Kong's major economic partners. Asked by the delegation, the pan-democrats noted that their dialogue with Taiwan's Nationalist Party ended with President Ma's opening to Beijing, while they themselves differ with the Democratic Progressive Party over Taiwan independence. End summary.

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Beijing's Influence  
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12. (SBU) The Acting Consul General convened a coffee of pan-democratic leaders to discuss their perspectives on democratic development in Hong Kong with CoDel Berman August 22. Chairman Berman noted his impression that the fundamentals of "one country, two systems" seemed to be holding up well. Pan-democratic leaders generally believed that rule of law was sound and the judiciary remained independent (to the fury of Beijing, which complains the courts are trying to run Hong Kong). However, they saw an erosion of Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy, with an increase in Beijing's use of its local representatives, and others claiming to speak for Beijing, to influence Hong Kong society.

13. (C) Confederation of Trade Unions (CTU) legislator Lee Cheuk-yan contended Beijing employs two key strategies to "brainwash" the people of Hong Kong. First is to convince the Hong Kong people (as Lee feels they are attempting to convince Taiwan) that they are economically dependent on the Mainland, and therefore should bend to Beijing's preferences politically. Second is to build pro-Beijing organizations as part of a strategy to link patriotism with support for the Chinese Communist Party in Hong Kong people's minds. He described a process of Beijing supporting the development of local patriotic organizations which appeared to have limitless funds. These organizations then became "get-out-the-vote" mechanisms during elections, supporting pro-Beijing parties.

¶4. (SBU) All the pan-democrats expressed pessimism about both the prospects for the 2012 reform package and the future of universal suffrage. Their definition of universal suffrage rests in Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which requires universal freedom to be nominated and run for office in addition to universal suffrage in voting. However, Democratic Party (DPHK) Vice Chairwoman and legislator Emily Lau pointed out the Hong Kong government continues to hold the reservation taken by the UK government on Article 25 (to allow the sectorally-elected functional constituencies - FCs) as valid. CTU's Lee noted Beijing had already mandated that the balance between directly-elected seats and the FCs must be maintained in ¶2012. Former Chief Secretary Anson Chan told the delegation many business leaders asserted to her that the FCs represent a check against populism and the rise of a welfare state. She and the other pan-democrats believe Beijing in the end will seek to retain FCs in some form, such as having FCs nominate candidates for popular election, which does not grant universal right of nomination.

¶5. (SBU) The pan-democrats also expressed concern about the nomination process for candidates for Chief Executive (CE). While the Basic Law specified there must be such a committee, its number and format are subject to discussion. Were the existing 800-member CE Election Committee to become a nominating committee, and the simple 100-vote nomination rule retained, CTU's Lee argued there might be a chance for a

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pan-democrat to be nominated and run. However, there is concern a requirement will arise that nominations include votes from each of the four sectors represented in the electoral committee (Industrial/Commercial, Professions, Labor/Social Organizations, and representatives to local and national government bodies), which would allow the business establishment to prevent a pan-democrat from running. Anson Chan described Beijing's interest in retaining the FCs and controlling CE nominations as seeking "managed democracy".

¶6. (SBU) All of the pan-democrats welcomed international interest in Hong Kong's democratic development. Anson Chan argued in particular that Hong Kong's major trading partners have a major interest in the success of "one country, two systems" because of what Hong Kong offers as a gateway to the China market. Yes, other cities in China can aspire to be economic centers, but they lack Hong Kong's "software" of a rule of law system and international economic expertise.

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Crisis in Leadership  
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¶7. (C) What Hong Kong needs, the pan-democrats argued, is a leader who is willing to stand up to Beijing and to the local business elites in support of democracy and "one country, two systems." Such a leader would take a hard line on eliminating the functional constituencies. S/he would also be willing to argue to Beijing that real democratic development for Hong Kong was vital to Hong Kong's prosperity and stability. They all believe the Tsang administration has failed to play this role, and appears more and more willing to accept direction from Beijing. Similarly, DPHK's Lau pointed out that the pro-Beijing political parties have supported and backed away from a series of dates for establishing universal suffrage, in pace with Beijing's decisions to delay universal suffrage.

¶8. (SBU) Noting they had spoken eloquently about the system of democracy, Rep. Kingston asked the pan-democrats what they had done to sell the concrete benefits of democracy to the Hong Kong people. DPHK's Lau noted first that the Hong Kong

people had already expressed support for democracy, with a majority supporting the pan-democrats since before the handover. What Hong Kong people understand is that the only way they will make the Hong Kong government accountable to them is by making them accountable at the ballot box. For example, Hong Kong right now is exploring a whole range of economic integration measures with Shenzhen, Lau said, but the government has not even consulted the legislature or mapped out what legal regime will cover these interactions.

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Dialogue with Taiwan  
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¶9. (C) Rep. Kingston asked the pan-democrats whether they were in dialogue with parties in Taiwan, given their shared interest in democracy. DPHK's Lau noted that the pan-democrats differed with the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) on independence issues, and thus were not in contact. She herself had attended a conference held by former Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui, and found herself vilified as pro-independence, which is not the case. Prior to their return to power, Lau continued, the pan-democrats spoke often with the Nationalists (KMT), and had observed several elections in Taiwan. However, after President Ma was elected, the KMT broke off these contacts, presumably as part of their overture to Beijing.

¶10. (U) Participants:

United States  
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Chairman Howard Berman  
Hon. Eni Faleomavaega  
Hon. Ruben Hinojosa  
Hon. Jack Kingston  
Hon. Diane Watson  
Acting Consul General Christopher Marut  
Acting DPO Martin Murphy  
Consulate and Congressional Staff

Hong Kong  
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Former Chief Secretary and former LegCo Member Mrs. Anson  
Chan Fong An-sang  
Hon. Emily Lau Wai-hing, Vice Chairwoman, Democratic Party  
Hon. Lee Cheuk-yan, General Secretary, Confederation of Trade Unions

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Hon. Cyd Ho Sau-lan, Civic Act-up

¶11. (U) CoDel Berman cleared thismessage.  
MARUT